

Inventors and Scientists: Thomas Edison

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A portrait of prolific inventor Thomas Edison. Photo: National Portrait Gallery

Synopsis: Thomas Edison was born on February 11, 1847, in Milan, Ohio. He invented many things during his life. He figured out how to record sound with the phonograph. His electric light bulb lit up the world. He died on October 18, 1931.

Younger Years

Thomas Alva Edison was born on February 11, 1847, in Milan, Ohio. When he was a child, he became ill. The illness made him lose most of his hearing.

Edison only went to school for a few weeks. He could not pay attention. His mother thought he would learn better at home. She was right. Edison learned how to teach himself.

Early Career

When he was 12, Edison lived near the Grand Trunk Railroad line. He sold newspapers to the passengers.

A brave act brought him good fortune. He saved a 3-year-old from being run over by a train. The child's father wanted to reward him. He taught Edison to send messages with a telegraph machine. The machine sent messages across long distances.

Edison worked as a telegraph operator as a teenager. At first he did well. Telegraph messages were printed on paper. Then new machines came out. They sent messages in the form of clicking sounds. Edison could not hear the clicks.

Becoming An Inventor

In 1869, Edison moved to New York City. He became an inventor, someone who comes up with ideas for new machines. His first invention was the Universal Stock Printer. He was paid \$40,000 for the rights to the machine. Edison was just 22 years old.

In 1870, Edison set up his factory in Newark, New Jersey. He sold his inventions to Western Union and other companies.

In 1876, he moved his growing company to Menlo Park, New Jersey. He was well known by then. In December 1877, Edison developed the phonograph. It was a machine that could record and play sound. The invention made him famous.

Edison Illuminating Company

Next, Edison invented a light bulb. He dreamed of lighting the cities of the world. In 1880, Edison founded the Edison Illuminating Company. The company later became the General Electric Corporation. In the early 1880s, he built a power station on Pearl Street in New York City. He brought electricity to other cities, too.

The Passing Of Edison

Thomas Edison died on October 18, 1931, in his home in New Jersey. He was 84 years old. People all over the world dimmed their lights to honor him. Edison had helped build the modern electric world.

Quiz

- 1 Read the paragraph from the article.

Next, Edison invented a light bulb. He dreamed of lighting the cities of the world. In 1880, Edison founded the Edison Illuminating Company. The company later became the General Electric Corporation. In the early 1880s, he built a power station on Pearl Street in New York City. He brought electricity to other cities, too.

What is the focus of this paragraph?

- (A) how Edison invented the light bulb
- (B) what Edison named his electric light company
- (C) how Edison brought light to cities
- (D) where Edison's power stations were located

- 2 Read these sentences from the section "Becoming An Inventor."

In December 1877, Edison developed the phonograph. It was a machine that could record and play sound. The invention made him famous.

Which MAIN idea of the article do these sentences support?

- (A) Thomas Edison's phonograph changed the world.
- (B) Thomas Edison enjoyed recording and playing music.
- (C) Thomas Edison's best invention was the phonograph.
- (D) Thomas Edison's creativity made him a great inventor.

- 3 Which section from the article explains how Edison first learned about machines?

- (A) "Younger Years"
- (B) "Early Career"
- (C) "Becoming An Inventor"
- (D) "Edison Illuminating Company"

- 4 Which paragraph from the section "Early Career" gives information about a problem caused by Edison's disability?

Answer Key

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- (C) "Becoming An Inventor"
- (D) "Edison Illuminating Company"

- 4 Which paragraph from the section “Early Career” gives information about a problem caused by Edison’s disability?

Paragraph 5:

Edison worked as a telegraph operator as a teenager. At first he did well.

Telegraph messages were printed on paper. Then new machines came out. They sent messages in the form of clicking sounds. Edison could not hear the clicks.